k not only enriches and promotes the growth and healing potential of art
the Eastern world, it also offers invaluable insights from the very sources of
an theories, philosophies, and practices already fully or partially adopted by
rofessionals. *Art Therapy in Asia* may become Asia's most valuable healing export
rld."

—Bobbi Stoll, founder of the International Networking Group of Art Therapists (ING/AT) and Past President of the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), currently chair of the International Member Subcommittee of the AATA

ok opened my eyes and expanded my mind in breathtaking ways. I hope that
n art therapists will read and learn from this thoughtful, stimulating contribution
bal growth of art therapy."

—Judith A. Rubin, Ph.D., ATR-BC, Department of Psychiatry, University of Pittsburgh, President of Expressive Media, Inc. and Past President and Honorary Life Member of the American Art Therapy Association

apy rapidly makes its mark across Asia, this book documents how the field of
y is taking shape as both a profession and a discipline in this region. Building
research, and practice that has been developed in the West, practitioners
t Asia are creating innovative art therapy programs that reflect cultural diversity
on ideas from Chinese medicine and Eastern philosophy, spirituality, and art
With chapters from leading art therapists and community artists in Hong
wan, Japan, Korea, Cambodia, Thailand, China, India, The Philippines, and
, this book pulls together thought-provoking perspectives and effective
s from which East and West can both learn.

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Art Therapy in Asia

TO THE BONE OR WRAPPED IN SILK

ED BY DEBRA KALMANOWITZ,
JORDAN S. POTASH AND SIU MEI CHAN

Chapter 10

Art Therapy Inspired by Buddhism

Yen Chua

As an artist and art therapist practising in Asia with a Western fine arts training, Chinese Taoist roots and Vajrayana Buddhist faith, I see immense opportunities for developing new and meaningful intervention models. It is my own personal experience with art, art therapy and healing over the last two decades which leads me to believe that such a union is possible, desirable and beneficial. Over the past three years, I have tried to develop several intervention models for my Buddhist and non-Buddhist clients which are inspired by my immediate cultural and spiritual heritage, specifically Buddhism.

Although there is growing homogeneity between the East and the West due to globalization, the need to make significant adjustments to account for Asian sensibility, sensitivity, culture, lifestyle and religion, which divide these two worlds, remains unchanged. When I call for art therapy with an Asian flavour, I have two main reasons. First, because there is a great difference between the East and the West when it comes to culture and tradition and, second, because the East has much to offer and inform art therapy practice. I feel strongly that if we do not share our Asian history and traditions it would be a great loss and disservice to the global art therapy theory, practice and profession.

It is self-evident that, for art therapy to work, the art therapist needs to understand and appreciate the cultural and social background of his or her client. His or her efficacy as an art therapist and ability to benefit the client is very much dependent on his or her knowledge and understanding of the environment of his or her practice. When we talk about perceptions, relationships and patterns of interactions with our environment, it is inevitable that social and cultural conditionings play a very important role. Since these factors have a major influence on how

clients perceive, relate and interact with their environment, it is important that art therapists are able to appreciate and understand these culture and value systems.

Revisiting art therapy in a Buddhist context: Considerations of the perceived dichotomy between science and spirituality

The worlds of psychology and religion have always been looked upon as two entirely different and perhaps incompatible realms, but when it comes to art therapy, this may not be the case. Both psychology and religion use the symbolic and transformative power of art to achieve their goals. In medical terminology, symbols reveal mental health, while in spiritual terminology they are used to cultivate happiness and peace of mind. In Buddhism and Hinduism, the transformative and healing power of art has always been appreciated and utilized to achieve the aforementioned purpose. They, just like art therapists, have not only tapped the power of art itself, but have also used the art-making process for such purposes for more than two millennia.

As a practising Buddhist familiar with different rituals and mind-training exercises employed to achieve self-awareness, understanding and peace of mind, I see great potential for the use and adaptation of the principles behind these practices in the development of culturally relevant art therapy intervention models. This observation is not new. In fact, during the early stages of modern psychology, Western psychologists were interested in this same idea. According to Katz (as cited in Norbu, 1992), 'Carl Jung was perhaps the first Western psychologist to be interested in Buddhism' (p.26). He was greatly interested in the use of symbolism in Buddhism, specifically the mandala and the intricate visualization practices associated with it. In this regards, Jung (1989) wrote, 'I knew that in finding the mandala as an expression of the self I had attained what was for me the ultimate' (p.197). Perhaps what drew Jung and many other students of psychology towards Buddhism is the fact that Buddhist texts and practices contain extensive exploration and detailed explanation about the working of the human mind and its nature.

Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche once famously said that Buddhism will come to the West as a psychology (Fischer, 2004). According to Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (1992), a renowned Buddhist master, 'Buddhist spiritual teachings present a genuine science of mind that allows one

to uncover this inner reality, the nature of the mind and the phenomena that our mind experiences' (p.1). Further, His Holiness the Dalai Lama (2003) wrote that 'Buddhism, an ancient Indian thought, reflects a deep investigation into the workings of the mind' (para.6). This knowledge gained from more than 2000 years of study and experimentation with the human mind, and the repositories of artworks and art creation techniques of this spiritual tradition, can be a literal treasure trove, which has not even been scraped at the surface. The rituals, practices and processes these traditions employed can be a rich resource and template for modern art therapists to study, understand and if possible adapt to use, with more scientifically and proven theories as support. Meditation is another area where I believe a lot can be achieved. According to McNiff (1998), 'The practice of sitting meditation can be integrated with reflection on artistic images' (p.186).

Although introducing new therapeutic interventions inspired by knowledge and wisdom from our ancient religious and spiritual traditions may sound very unscientific, when it comes to art therapy and Buddhism a very logical and convincing case can be made. The fact that Buddhism also stresses a scientific approach of inquiry and verification helps greatly. In fact, Buddha's own advice to knowledge and wisdom disciples was 'Just as a goldsmith would test his gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it, so you must examine my words and accept them, but not merely out of reverence for me' (Dalai Lama, 1995, p.26). The practitioners who used the meditations, visualization techniques and rituals studied the teachings on which they were based and have tried and tested them for centuries. It was this very idea of promoting cooperation between science and spirituality that inspired Chilean biologist, philosopher and neuroscientist Francisco Javier Varela García to found the Mind and Life Institute (MLI). Multi-disciplinary investigations and research in the traditional mind sciences, social sciences, contemplative scholarship and practice, philosophy and humanities are being conducted by MLI 'with the conviction that such collaboration could potentially be very beneficial to both modern science and to humanity in general' (MLI, n.d., para.8).

Over the last 15 years the psychology field has seen a resurgence in the use of mindfulness for a variety of conditions. According to Fields (2009), 'Buddhism and mindfulness is capturing the interest, heart, and imagination of the counseling field' (para.1). Meditation and mindfulness practices are being used effectively for the treatment of stress, anxiety, depression, pain and personality disorders. According to Watson (2001), 'Buddhism's centuries of exploration of subjective mind states may be a resource for Western science' (para.8). In fact, many of these rituals, artworks and art creation processes (whether physical or mental such as visualization of mandalas) are used very effectively to achieve desired mental or spiritual states. I think these techniques can and should be explored and adapted by art therapists today. In some sense, these people who formulated these elaborate techniques are the pioneers of our tradition.

As an artist, Buddhist and practising art therapist, I see great potential in this area because, in my own personal journey of healing and self-discovery, both my profession as an artist and spiritual practice played very important and harmonious roles. This experience gave birth to two important realizations. First, that art in itself, if used as a medium of exploring and understanding self-identity and nature, has great revelatory and healing power. Second, these spiritual traditions which have a history of using art to aid such contemplation, examination and reflection can also contribute greatly to this journey of healing and self-discovery and should not be shunned as unscientific or antiquated. Having made these two observations, I would like to share two intervention models from the many that I have developed based on these ideas. The first one was designed for my general clients, but inspired by certain Buddhist wisdom, practices and rituals. The second was designed for my Buddhist clients and inspired by different art therapy intervention models that I have come across and ideas I have myself come up with while teaching art for almost a decade and a half.

Art therapy inspired by Buddhist wisdom, practices and rituals

Although this intervention model is inspired by Buddhist wisdom, practices and rituals, the aim was to secularize these ideas and techniques to help my non-Buddhist clients develop emotional and mental wellbeing. As a result, these interventions can be used for clients who may not necessarily be Buddhist.

Being in the 'here and now'

According to Kabat-Zinn (2005), 'Mindfulness is a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in our lives' (p.2). While I do not specifically instruct my non-Buddhist clients to meditate before

they begin making art, I consider it very important and always make an effort to allow them to settle down, calm their mind and be peaceful for a while, so that they are fully engaged and aware during the entire art-making process. Siegel (2007) wrote, 'Being aware of the fullness of our experience awakens us to the inner world of our mind' (p.3). Usually we are so caught up in what we are thinking and doing that we are tense and unaware of what is really happening around us. This lack of awareness numbs us and decreases the impact of the therapy process on us. A brief moment of meditative repose, mindful silence and relaxation can help calm the mind, settle in the present moment and concentrate on the task at hand. Such moments can bring clarity of thought and purpose, which is very beneficial for art making and art therapy. In addition to more purposeful art experiences, mindfulness can 'improve the capacity to regulate emotion, to combat emotional dysfunction, to improve patterns of thinking, and to reduce negative mindsets' (Siegel, 2007, p.5).

When I begin my session, I ask my clients to be attentive to the present moment, often referred to as the 'here and now'. I ask them to sit silently for a brief period and be calm. Asking the clients to take a short meditative break before starting the session is possible without affecting or offending their religious sensitivities, because some form of meditative reflection is practised in most global religious traditions. Meditation is simply being mindful and aware. Even in a secular setting, it is a recommended practice for anyone who would like to cultivate a sense of peace and calmness. Although there are many different spiritual and secular ways of achieving this calm, it can be achieved by giving a few simple instructions like, 'Take a few deep breaths, put everything aside, bring yourself to this room, be here and now, be present in the moment and relax...etc.'

After the art-making process and before the sharing begins, I also try to allow a pause and give time for settling down and reflection. I find that, for a meaningful sharing to occur, proper reflection on the part of the client needs to take place. Meditation masters have often used the metaphor of a calm lake, which is necessary for the best reflection of the sky, to stress that, to be aware of how our minds work and how our emotions control and drive us, we need to have calm and clear minds. The purpose of this contemplation break after the art-making session is to allow all raw emotions and disturbed thoughts that arose during the art-making session to settle. It also gives the clients time to compose their thoughts and look at whatever happened during the art-making process in a more objective and profound way.

Envisioning a 'perfect self'

Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism employs deity visualization techniques during which the practitioner focuses on and identifies with the qualities of certain aspirational *Yidams* (meditation deities), like *Mañjuśrī*, the Buddha of Transcendental Wisdom, and *Avalokiteśvara*, the Buddha of Compassion. Yidams are the immaculate reflection or representation of the primordial and innate true nature of our own mind. In layman's language, they are the representation of us in our perfect form. What Buddha taught, in his Vajrayana teachings, is that in reality all of us are perfect. The Yidam visualization is therefore a powerful technique which has been used for centuries to acquaint or reacquaint practitioners with their true nature and hidden potential. According to Beer (2004), 'Deity Yoga employs highly refined techniques of creative imagination, visualization, and photism in order to self-identify with the divine form and qualities of a particular deity as the union of method or skillful means and wisdom' (p.142). When Vajrayana practitioners visualize the images or the form of a Yidam with its specific qualities, it is to help them work with their own mind to realize their own true nature.

To assist in this process, we can derive inspiration from the Buddhist concept of ten negative and ten positive deeds or actions. The ten negative deeds are very much like the 'thou shall not' of the Ten Commandments and the ten positive deeds are the 'thou shall' ones. Decreasing the former and increasing the latter is taught as the path to enlightenment or achievement of perfection. This teaching runs parallel to the common sense that committing fewer mistakes and doing more good deeds will lead to a happier and better self. This idea can be incorporated to help clients minimize their shortcomings and weaknesses and maximize their positive attributes or acquiring positive traits that lead to self-improvement and perfection.

While the Yidam visualization technique itself is complicated and is an esoteric practice that needs guidance and permission, there are core elements that I can use in my practice without contravening these codes. Some of the principles behind this technique are instructive and effective and therefore can be used to inspire someone to envision true potential and work towards this goal. I developed the intervention 'My Perfect Self' to help my clients visualize and work towards a better self.

Clients are first asked to envision or visualize themselves in perfect form with all aspirational qualities realized. After the visualization, they create a representational drawing of that perfect self. As Buddhist practitioners

realized long ago, seeing the representation of an actualization potential or dream can be a very powerful motivating force. Seeing what is possible motivates people to work harder and realize their dreams. When making this representation, the client is asked to think of and then use various symbols to signify the desired attributes of this perfect self.

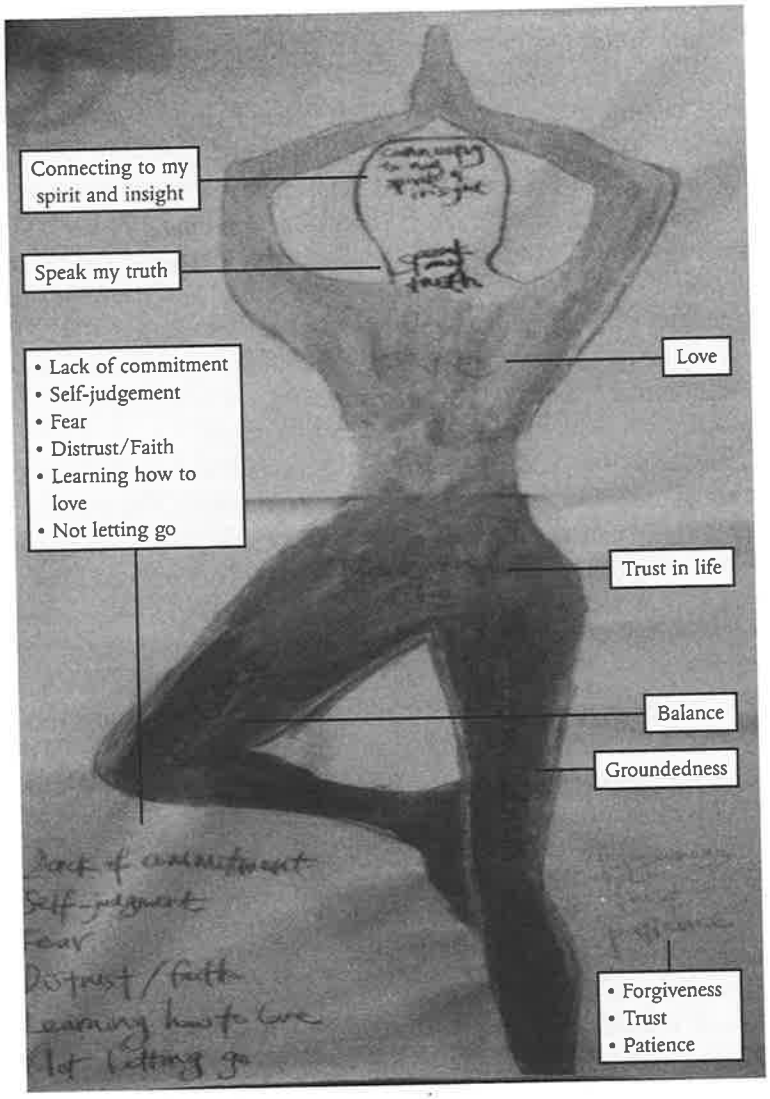

Figure 10.1 *'My Perfect Self' (1)*

Following this step, clients are then asked to either draw or list on the left side of the perfect self picture, using symbols or words, a few important deficiencies or negative qualities which are preventing them from realizing this perfect self. Next, on the right side, they draw or list certain qualities, which they require or may already possess, but need to amplify or improve upon, to realize the perfect self. Figures 10.1 and 10.2 are examples of 'My Perfect Self'. In order to make their writing more legible, I have added annotations to these photographs.

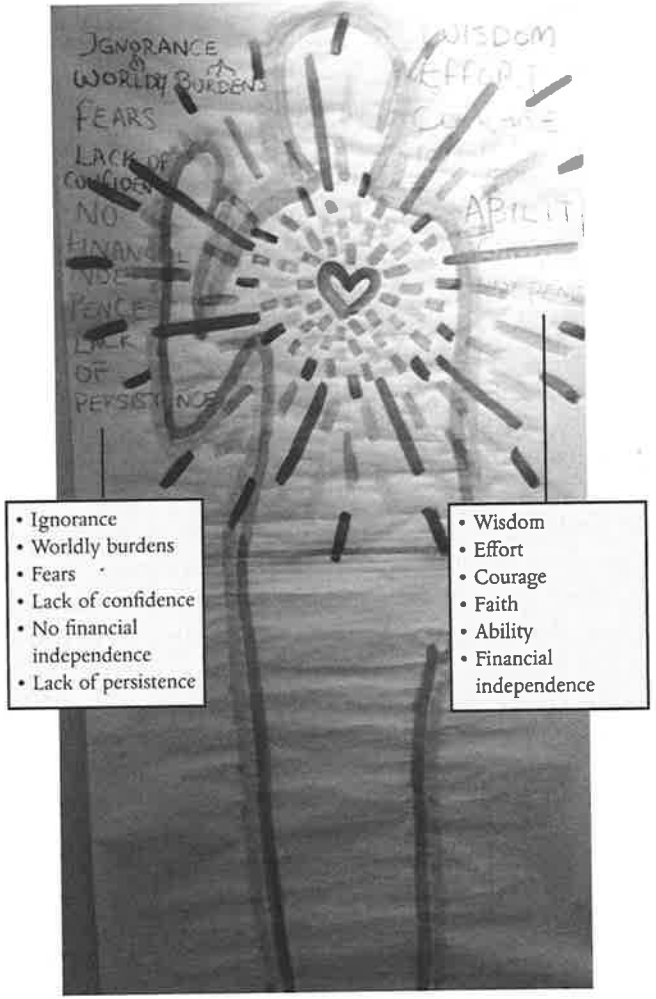

Figure 10.2 *'My Perfect Self' (2)*

Art therapy intervention for Buddhist clients

As previously stated, Tantric or esoteric Buddhism has used art and the art creation process for various purposes like meditation to achieve focus and concentration and as a medium to introduce and illustrate concepts like impermanence and interdependence through symbolic metaphors. Inspired by the idea of integrating my art therapy background with my knowledge of Buddhism, I started a group to help my Buddhist clients gain a clearer understanding of core Buddhist teachings and values, and thus promote spiritual wellbeing.

Over eight to ten sessions, I explored with the group members important Buddhist concepts like attachment, aversion, compassion, self-perception, suffering, happiness, interdependence, rebirth, the law of Karma, virtue and wisdom. At the beginning of each session, after going through the usual preparation routine, I asked the group to think about a specific Buddhist principle to use for art making. I based the media on the nature of the concept I wanted them to explore on that particular day. During these workshops, the participants not only gained greater clarity and understanding of important Buddhist ideas, but also appreciated how the teachings were relevant and applicable to their own lives, as well as the lives of their fellow participants. The sharing sessions which followed each episode of art making also allowed them to compare their interpretations and, at times, clarify their understanding of these principles.

While working on the concept of aversion or hatred, I used my knowledge about materials and asked the participants to use clay to create an object that represented what they thought was their enemy. After a group-sharing session on the nature of aversion or hatred from a Buddhist and Buddhist practitioner's perspective, I encouraged them to transform the enemy into something else based on the realization they gained during the art-making process and sharing session. Surprisingly, many participants were able to transform the enemy into something more positive or friendly.

During some of the sessions, certain concepts like 'attachment and aversion', 'suffering and happiness' and 'compassion and wisdom' were deliberately paired so that the participants could appreciate these concepts in a more comprehensive manner. The purpose was to help them experience the underlying dichotomous, but also complementary, relationship, which is a very important realization a Buddhist practitioner must make. I asked the participants to divide the paper into two or three folds and draw their interpretation of one concept on each side so that their juxtaposition would allow for a comparison and contrast to aid further exploration of the relationships. Through this process a client expressed her realization of the Buddhist concept that compassion and wisdom go hand in hand.

I used the same technique to address the concept of reincarnation and cyclic existence. The participants were asked to fold their art paper into three parts with each panel serving as a canvas for each phase of their life: the past, the present and the future. When we explored the purpose of the dedication of merits (acts to elevate spirituality), the participants actually created an artwork which could be offered as a dedication.

In addition to exploring specific Buddhist concepts, I also facilitated groups that allowed the participants to reflect on how their lives reflect Buddhist ideals. To achieve this goal, I developed an intervention called 'Action and Result'. Each participant in the group was provided with a sheet of paper and asked to depict on one half of the paper an action (positive or negative) that they performed in the past. On the other half, they were asked to depict the consequences of that action which they have experienced or are still experiencing at present. After the art making was complete, the participants were asked to reflect upon the relationship between their actions and its consequences in their present lives. This practice is a 'Buddhist After-Action Review'. The participants were encouraged to reflect upon how their actions had profound consequences on their lives and why it was important to be mindful about each of their actions. We reflected on how, once it was performed, they then had to bear the consequences of these actions, whether positive or negative.

My purpose behind developing this exercise was to help the participants reflect upon the relationship between their actions and its consequences. The Law of Karma, an important Buddhist tenet, teaches that each and every action (Karma) has its reciprocal result (Phala). Although most Buddhists know this concept and accept it to be true (because without accepting it, one cannot really be a Buddhist), often it remains just an idea or concept in mind. Many never really sit down and perform any introspection on how profound the principle itself is and the various implications it has in their lives. This intervention provided a time and space for participants to review and reflect upon their own actions and resulting consequences. This exercise has proven itself to be a powerful way to drive home the real understanding of the teaching of the Law of Karma.

Subsequent group sharing after the personal reflection segment illustrated that this helped develop an appreciation of the principle on a very personal level and brought its relevance and truth to light for the participants. It was no longer an abstract theory or principle but something they found to be real in their own lives. For example, Figure 10.3 was created by a participant whose relative had passed on because of a terminal disease. This intervention provided her with the opportunity to understand and process the emotional burden she carried and understand the profundity of her actions on her life. The participant realized that she was living with feelings of guilt, because she felt that she had taken her loved one for granted, and now wished that she had paid more attention to the relative when she was alive.

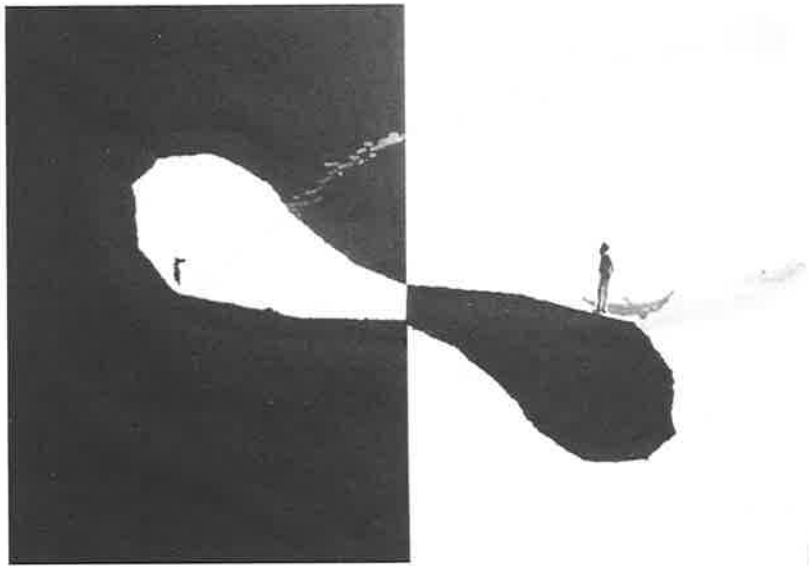

Figure 10.3 *Compassion and wisdom*

Discussion

Art therapy is an evolving practice, and I believe that it is incumbent upon us to enrich this practice by sharing with others our personal experiences and creating newer and more meaningful intervention models with the ultimate aim of benefiting our clients. During my study and practice, at times I encountered strict dogmatism and rigid interpretations of art

therapy concepts, such as ideas on therapeutic boundaries. I believe that the journey of self-discovery and self-realization is very personal, intimate and unique in nature. Our best contribution can be sharing our own experiences and observations in the hope that they can benefit a fellow traveller. This idea is rooted in my Buddhist belief, as in Buddhism there is no concept of an intervening saviour. Buddha is seen as a benevolent friend who guides us on the path to enlightenment. The journey always has to be our own. Being a Buddhist and an art therapist whose ultimate aim is to benefit my clients in whichever way I can, I have learnt to look beyond these concepts and ideology to focus on the main intention behind them and never lose sight of my raison d'être as an art therapist. This motivation inspires me to learn more, work harder and come up with new intervention models inspired by my cultural context.

When I design my workshops, for example my Buddhist art therapy workshops, my purpose and intention is never to preach my interpretation of Buddha's teachings to my clients but rather to help them explore, clarify, compare and reflect on these important concepts on their own and as a result gain a more profound understanding about the meaning and implications of these teachings. I see the art creation process as a method, the art therapist as a facilitator and guide, and group members as fellow companions on the path of self-discovery and enlightenment. This model has great resonance with the Buddhist idea of Triple Gems: Buddha as the guide, Dharma (teaching) as the path and the Sangha (community) as the companion. Amazingly, this idea of companionship seems to resonate in the participants too. It is to their credit that several months after the first workshop they still find time to meet up once in a while and maintain the sense of communion and fellowship that was established during the workshop.

My approach is the same when I work with my non-Buddhist clients too. I believe that self-realization is much more meaningful and powerful than external intervention. Therefore, I see my role as an art therapist as primarily to provide a framework in which therapy can occur. The journey is, and should always be, the clients'. Unless my intervention becomes absolutely necessary, I usually limit my role to that of a facilitator, friend and companion who has been on the journey before or knows the path well and can therefore provide some helpful tips whenever needed.

Conclusion

I have been an artist for about two decades and have taught art and have been a Buddhist for more than a decade and a half. Over the last five years, two years of training and three of practice, I have had the good fortune to work as an art therapist in many settings, including a hospital, prison, youth care and rehabilitation, wellness centre, special needs and also private practice. After much reflection on this journey, I have come to realize that the convergence of three seemingly different aspects of my own life – personal, spiritual and professional – into a symbiotic union is not accidental, but rather an evolutionary and natural progression for me. I have moved from awareness about self towards awareness about the relationship between self and others, and then from awareness about self and others towards transcending self and benefiting others.

Having been, myself, a witness to the immense benefit of art and Buddhism in my own life and seeing how together they helped me to heal and overcome many personal demons, I began to appreciate how they can work in complementary fashion and serve as an effective curative process which can lead an individual towards a journey of self-discovery and healing. Inspired by this realization and belief, over the last two years I have tried to develop these intervention models which seek complementary elements and strategies in art therapy practice. I am glad to say I have yielded very positive results both in individual and group settings. As an art therapist, I wish to explore newer possibilities as my understanding of the human mind and condition grows and changes over time. I will refine my practice by examining my intervention models and verifying their efficacy and theoretical basis.

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